

## REVIEWS

SITTINGS WITH EUSAPIA PALLADINO AND OTHER STUDIES. By Everard Feilding, with Introduction by E. J. Dingwall. University Books, New York, 1963. xxii + 324 pp. \$10.00.

This book consists mainly of the report 'Sittings with Eusapia Palladino' by Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally and Hereward Carrington, which originally appeared in the *S.P.R. Proceedings*, Vol. 23 (1909). It also contains five short articles and an introduction.

In his introduction, Dr Dingwall gives a short outline of Feilding's life and of his activities in psychical research. He 'found Everard Feilding to be the most acute and well-balanced investigator I ever encountered, and, in addition, one of the noblest characters I ever met' (p. xx). Feilding had great gifts as a critic and expositor and also a good sense of humour. He served on the S.P.R. Council from 1900 to 1929, being a Joint Honorary Secretary for part of this period.

Of the five short articles, three are by Feilding, one is by Baggally, and one is a joint statement by Feilding, Baggally and three other S.P.R. members. The first of these is 'The Case of the Haunted Solicitor', originally published in the *S.P.R. Journal*, Vol. 12 (1905), about the investigation of an alleged poltergeist. It turned out that some of the apports produced by it were hidden in a clever way, which had not been fully guessed before the confession of fraud was obtained. Nevertheless, this confession did not concern the earlier 'poltergeist' phenomena, and it remained doubtful whether or not these were genuine.

The second article is 'Sittings with Mr Chambers', originally published in the *S.P.R. Journal*, Vol. 12 (1905) as a joint statement by five S.P.R. members, describing the elementary tricks used by the fraudulent 'physical medium' Christopher Chambers to deceive Spiritualists during the early years of this century.

The third article is Baggally's report 'Some Sittings with Carancini', originally published in the *S.P.R. Journal*, Vol. 14 (1909-10). All these 13 sittings in July and August 1909 were attended by Baggally and all but one of them by Feilding. Although Carancini seemed willing to submit to any precautions, few 'phenomena' occurred and these, except for some raps, took place in complete darkness. Thus the conditions under which they occurred were very unsatisfactory, and it was later found that they could all be reproduced by normal means. The investigators

concluded that Carancini was fraudulent and also caught one of the sitters, a 'Miss X', acting as his accomplice.

The fourth article is 'The Case of the Abbé Vachère', originally published in the Transactions of the Fourth International Congress for Psychical Research at Athens (1930). Here, Feilding discusses some puzzling phenomena, mostly 'Bleeding' from religious pictures and statues, and also the 'weeping' of a figure of the Virgin, which were alleged to occur in the presence of this Abbé. Although he made several attempts at first-hand investigation, Feilding was unable to reach any conclusions as to whether they were genuine and how they were caused. This case seems to be partly similar to the 'Weeping Angel of Worthing' phenomena of today.

In the fifth article 'Can Psychical Research Contribute to Religious Apologetics?', which originally appeared in the *Dublin Review* (April-June 1925), Feilding, as a Roman Catholic, reviews the various attitudes to psychical research that have been held by Roman Catholics and puts a strong case for his own view that the methods of experimental psychical research are potentially able to make important contributions to certain questions of religious belief, especially the problem of survival and the nature of life after death.

It is already evident from reading these articles, that Feilding was a remarkably open-minded, yet also very careful, investigator. He was an expert exposé of fraudulent mediums, but he did not fall into the trap of dismissing alleged parapsychical phenomena as nonsense on those occasions when there was insufficient evidence to prove either that they were genuine or that they had normal explanations or that they were faked.

The report 'Sittings with Eusapia Palladino' consists of four parts: introduction, general account of the sittings, detailed reports of each of the 11 sittings, and individual conclusions of the investigators.

The introduction discusses the results of previous investigations of Eusapia Palladino's mediumship, from which it is clear that, although she used trickery on several occasions, there was considerable evidence in favour of her genuine physical mediumship, enough to convince some but not all of the scientists investigating her. As a result, the S.P.R. Council in 1908 decided that she should not be dismissed out of hand as completely fraudulent and appointed a Committee of three investigators to undertake an exceptionally careful test of her claims. This report records the findings of this Committee.

The sittings were held during November and December 1908

on the fifth floor of the Hotel Victoria, Naples, in the middle room of the row of three rooms booked by the Committee. A diagram of these rooms faces page 55. The seance room and its fittings are described on page 55. Two photographs of parts of it and its furniture face pages 30 and 31. From this description and from the authors' other comments, it is clear that no accomplice could have entered this room, nor could any but the slightest apparatus have been hidden there without their knowledge. There was a 'cabinet', consisting of one corner of the room screened off by a pair of curtains. Just outside the 'cabinet', the seance table was placed, with the medium sitting just in front of the curtains, with her back to them, and usually with two of the investigators sitting on both sides of her, keeping control of her hands, legs and feet. Other sitters sat round the remaining parts of the table. A stenographer, Mr Meeson, sat at another table. He took detailed shorthand notes of everything that was said, recording the times of incidents to the nearest minute, and he also adjusted the intensity of the lighting, also keeping complete records of the times of its changes. As far as the investigators could find out, he had never previously met the medium.

The investigators decided to try to determine whether or not the 'phenomena' were due to trickery, and they made no attempt to examine scientifically the nature of the 'force' involved in whatever genuine manifestations might occur. They decided to adopt as far as possible conditions to which the medium was used, in order to maximize the probability of obtaining positive results. At the same time, they took every precaution they could to prevent fraud. They found that, *the better the control conditions, the better the phenomena*; this is just the opposite of what would be expected if they were not genuine, unless a fantastic skill of trickery was present. '... it was on the nights when she was in the best humour, and consequently when our precautions were most complete and the light the strongest, that the phenomena were the most numerous. On the other hand, when she seemed in bad health, or was in a bad humour or indisposed for the seance, she appeared to try to evade our control. . . . The phenomena on those occasions were rarer and of small account, *and we did not find that reduction of light, and the consequent increased facility for fraud, had any effect in stimulating them*' (pp. 33-4). Although the medium was sometimes caught substituting hands, in a subtle way that caused a tactile sensation of continuous contact, such substitution did not take place in those seances where there was adequate light, unless, as the investigators suggest, 'our coincident sensations of both sight and touch were constantly hallucinatory'

(p. 36). Similarly, in the best seances, the investigators' control of her feet seemed adequate.

470 physical phenomena are recorded as having occurred during the 11 seances. Of these, 305 occurred when the investigators controlled, 144 when one investigator and one outside sitter controlled, 21 when two outside sitters controlled. In some seances, no outside sitters were present. Of the 305 phenomena occurring when the investigators were in control, and thus where control was likely to be most strict, there were 34 complete levitations of the seance table, 59 bulgings and movements of curtains, 4 bulgings of the medium's dress, 28 movements of objects within the 'cabinet', 41 movements of objects (other than the seance table) outside the 'cabinet', 5 incidents where objects were brought outside the 'cabinet', 28 incidents of apparently paranormal sounds (including raps and sounds on the musical instruments without contact), 74 apparently paranormal touches (including many by 'materialized hands'), 3 incidents where hands (other than the medium's!) were seen, 22 objects of an indefinable nature seen (5 of which resembled heads), 5 incidents of unusual lights, 2 incidents when air currents issued from the medium's head. These 305 phenomena covered the whole range of manifestations witnessed, except for one incident of apparent untying of knots, which was not too well authenticated. At earlier seances, the simpler phenomena (levitations, curtain movements, touches, raps) predominated, but, later, new phenomena were added at almost every seance.

Some of these phenomena were obtained under very good evidential conditions. For example, total levitations of the seance table, up to two feet above the floor and without any visible contact, for a duration of up to three seconds, were observed on several occasions in very good light. Partial levitations, with two legs of the table only on the floor, lasted for about a minute, under similar conditions, and the investigators often met considerable resistance when they tried to depress the table.

The investigators eventually reached the conclusion that at least some of the phenomena that they witnessed were the result of genuine physical mediumship. Two of them (Baggally and Carrington) were skilled conjurors and all three of them had had extensive experience in detecting fraudulent mediums. So they entered the investigation with cautious though open minds, expecting trickery to occur but on the look-out also for anything genuine. 'It was only through constant repetition of the same phenomenon, in a good light and at moments when its occurrence was expected, and after finding that none of the precautions which

we took had any influence in impeding it, that we gradually reached the conviction that some force was in play which was beyond the reach of ordinary control, and beyond the skill of the most skilful conjurer. But though we have come to that general conclusion, we find it exceedingly difficult to say to which particular phenomena, or even to which particular kind of phenomena, we have sufficiently strict evidence to apply it' (p. 50). These conclusions, based on their impressions of the series as a whole, gave the investigators a sense of certainty that the phenomena were *not all* explainable by trickery; they stress that their conclusions are the result of their *first-hand* experience and that they do not expect all their readers to reach the same state of conviction from their report alone. As they freely admit, it can at best provide only a partial idea of what really happened and, in particular, it gives an incomplete picture of the controls which were actually applied to the medium.

In the absence of trickery, they postulate the alternative hypotheses that genuine parapsychical phenomena occurred or that they were '*concurrently and collectively* hallucinated'. They consider that the hypothesis of hallucination is less likely, partly because their attention was continually alert as they were always addressing their spoken reports and comments to the stenographer, partly because the medium made no verbal suggestions to them, partly because any suggestion of hallucination would have had to overcome an attitude of considerable scepticism in the earlier seances, partly because some other investigators of Eusapia Palladino would also have had to be hallucinated, and so on. Thus they conclude that some genuine physical mediumship actually occurred at some of these sittings.

Several fairly hostile criticisms of this report were made shortly after its issue, but Feilding did not substantially alter his position as a result (see p. xiii). In his short note on it in page 15, Dr Dingwall says that it 'is the best and most detailed account published on this medium [Eusapia Palladino] and owes its excellence to the efficient team work of the three investigators, of whom Mr Feilding was the inspirer and leader. . . . At a time when automatic registration was only just beginning and could not here be employed, it set the model for such inquiries and will only be superseded when another similar medium is found who will cooperate with the investigators in a laboratory equipped with photographic and sound-recording devices, coupled with the delicate modern methods of ascertaining varying temperatures, barometric pressure, etc.' This is high praise from one who is very critical in his standards of what constitutes good psychical

research! In their book *The Unknown—Is it Nearer?* (Cassell, 1956), Dr Dingwall and Mr Langdon-Davies stated that the investigators were 'so competent that we have to accept their word for what they saw, and what they saw was inexplicable in terms of fraud. . . . From everything that is known of these three gentlemen, it seems impossible to imagine that a fake would get past them' (Chapter 11). In contrast, Mr Rawcliffe, in *The Psychology of the Occult* (Ridgway, 1952), takes an extremely sceptical view (Chapter 21). He refuses (unreasonably in my opinion) to believe that any medium, who has been caught in fraud, can ever produce genuine phenomena. He thinks that the investigators, in spite of their experience of conjuring, were careless and unable to detect the tricks that Eusapia Palladino pulled on them. But I do not know of *anyone* who has suggested *specifically* how she did trick them, if in fact she did, on those occasions when the investigators thought that she was well controlled. Mr Tyrrell, in *The Personality of Man* (Penguin Books, 1947), gives a factual summary of this investigation, with quotations, and seems to endorse their conclusions (Chapter 25). Dr West, in *Psychical Research Today* (Second Edition, Penguin Books, 1962), does not mention it at all, although he devotes considerable space to a discussion of the possibilities of deception and bad observation in the seance room (Chapter 2).

My own verdict is that Baggally, Carrington and Feilding were psychical researchers of the highest calibre, all too rare in the history of psychical research and especially today. Because they were experienced in conjuring and methods of trickery, because they were careful observers and record-keepers, because of their initially sceptical attitude, and because of their *gradual* conversion to a conviction that trickery could not explain *all* the phenomena, their positive conclusions are all the more impressive. Personally, I agree with them that Eusapia Palladino produced genuine phenomena of physical mediumship in this series of sittings. I think that the evidence there for levitations and paranormal object movements is particularly striking. The evidence for paranormal sounds and touches is good but inevitably less convincing, as it depends on more subjective perceptions. There is also considerable evidence for 'ectoplasmic' phenomena, where some paranormal 'forces' seemed to exert partial and temporary control over some of the matter from the medium's body.

However, I am not entirely sure how far Feilding and his colleagues have disposed of the alternative hypothesis of hallucination. I have a feeling that there are aspects of hallucination, bad observation and hypnotism (without the knowledge of the hypno-

tized person!) which are still inadequately realized and which should be explored further in a series of new experiments as soon as possible.

Again, some critics may try to claim that Feilding and his colleagues were themselves accomplices in a conspiracy of fraud or at least in a huge practical joke! This I do not believe, although I cannot disprove it.

What are the implications of this investigation for the study of physical mediumship today. Firstly, under *present* circumstances, it is impossible to reach any *one definite conclusion* about the reality of its phenomena, which *must* be believed by *every* rational person. Because it is still possible to interpret the evidence in several ways, as far as most people are concerned, the conclusion which anyone will reach, when faced with the evidence, will still depend on his prior beliefs and general philosophy of life, which must in anyone be at least partly a matter of faith. Thus several possible interpretations of alleged physical mediumship can all be viewed as beliefs which are not irrational inside the frames of reference in which they are held. Personal experience of a paranormal phenomenon, if strong enough, will of course rule the fraud hypothesis out of court *for that person* but not for the general public. Public acceptance will come only after *repeatable* evidence is obtained in such a flood that the sceptics' position will be overwhelmed. There seems to be little prospect of this happening in the near future.

Nevertheless, I do think that there are some prospects of further positive results from the investigation of physical mediumship in the next few years. There are enough well-evidenced reports of its phenomena through the past century to give fair indication to the psychical researcher, to whose world view they are not entirely alien, that they do occur though comparatively rarely in a spectacular form. At the present time, no good physical medium is known to the general public,<sup>1</sup> but I suspect that a few are available to certain private circles. Judging by my own ostensible paranormal perceptions of appearing and disappearing objects on rare occasions, I also suspect that *mild* physical mediumship phenomena may be much more widespread among the population than is generally supposed. But the very greatest care must be taken to guard against bad observation and hallucination, when evaluating reports of such spontaneous incidents.

The book under review contains a most valuable record of one of the great pioneering investigations of physical mediumship; it

<sup>1</sup> With the possible exception of the alleged physical mediumship phenomena now occurring in Brazil.

contains evidence in its favour of such strength that it is not unreasonable for a psychical researcher to consider it authentic, though it would be over-optimistic to expect it to carry conviction with the confirmed sceptics.

ALAN MAYNE

PARAPSYCHOLOGY: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF ESP. By J. Gaither Pratt. Doubleday, New York. 300 pp. \$4.95.

Dr Pratt possesses the almost unique distinction of having pursued his chosen career as a professional parapsychologist continuously ever since his student days. Until recently, when he accepted a research post in the University of Virginia, he has worked under Dr Rhine at the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke, the university which he first entered as a student of divinity. In 1932 he switched to psychology, and his first contact with parapsychology came soon after this when he was enlisted as a student helper in Rhine's early trials with the card-guessing technique. Since then, Dr Pratt has experienced at close quarters all the extraordinary gains and setbacks which have characterised the recent history of experimental parapsychology. Almost alone among his colleagues at Duke, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, he has remained consistently faithful to the subject, neither throwing in his hand and taking up some other career, nor resorting to the common device of substituting academic criticism or theoretical discourse for the harder path of practical experimentation.

Pratt's career has spanned many phases in the psi saga. First came the apparent 'breakthrough', when the Duke people had a plethora of high scoring subjects and universal acceptance and confirmation seemed imminent. Then came the stormy years of controversy, followed by the lean years of scores only marginally different from chance. Then came the fashion for looking for secondary patterns and effects (decline through the run, psi missing, displacement etc.) in order to demonstrate a supposedly concealed or devious manifestation of ESP. Then there was the PK or dice-willing phase, which itself followed a peculiar course, beginning with straightforward successful results, and ending in devious effects unintended by the subjects. Then there was the fashion for dividing potential ESP subjects according to personality variables, in an effort to obtain reproducible results by identifying consistently negative and consistently positive scoring individuals. Then there was the phase of concern with the guessing patterns of successful high-scorers, like